



Assessing the Relationship Between Public Trust and Ethical Reporting of Afghanistan International TV

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Abstract: This study explores the perceptions of Afghan journalists and political analysts regarding Afghanistan International TV's adherence to journalistic ethics in covering the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA). Using a structured online questionnaire distributed to 122 respondents inside and outside Afghanistan, the study assesses the channel's performance in impartiality, accuracy, fairness, and independence. The findings reveal significant concerns about ownership influence, editorial bias, limited transparency, and weak confidentiality practices, which collectively erode public trust. Although most respondents stated that the channel's reporting has minimal impact on their professional work, they acknowledged its influence on public opinion. Overall, the study highlights widespread skepticism about media credibility in Afghanistan and emphasizes the need for stronger ethical standards and more balanced reporting across Afghan media outlets.

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INTRODUCTION

Following the re-establishment of the Islamic Emirate in 2021, Afghanistan's media landscape has undergone profound transformation amid ongoing political instability (Araz, 2023). The media in post-2021 Afghanistan not only functions as a tool for information dissemination but also serves as a crucial instrument for shaping public opinion, constructing national identity, and influencing political discourse. As Tuğtekin et al. (2020) note, the Afghan media continues to play a central role in shaping narratives on governance, human rights, and international relations, despite facing regulatory constraints and political pressure. Within this environment, Afghanistan International Television (AITV), a broadcaster operating from outside the country, has positioned itself as an independent and professional news outlet. However, its coverage of the Islamic Emirate and related socio-political issues has sparked

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significant debate about its credibility, objectivity, and adherence to ethical journalism standards (Williams et al., 1983). Media ethics, including honesty, neutrality, and accountability, are essential for sustaining public trust, especially in politically sensitive contexts (Ward, 2005; Deuze, 2005). Yet, achieving these principles in Afghanistan remains challenging due to censorship, journalist intimidation, and external political influence (Anderson et al., 2014).

The deterioration of press freedom and the rise of politically influenced narratives have raised public skepticism toward media credibility in Afghanistan (Srikanth et al., 2023). While some scholars argue that exiled media can offer more independent and critical perspectives, others caution that such outlets may unconsciously reflect the interests or biases of their host countries (Hallin et al., 2017). The events that the Afghan media have encountered have highlighted previous activities, threats to press freedom, political interference, and limited access to verified sources (Srikanth et al., 2023). Among the solutions offered by Afghanistan, a critical proposal is offered regarding its credibility, especially in the portrayal of sensitive personal entities such as the Islamic Emirate (Park et al., 2026). Despite these debates, limited empirical research has been conducted to evaluate how Afghan audiences and journalists perceive the ethical practices of exiled media, particularly AITV (Pratama et al., 2023).

This study aims to fill this gap by examining the perceptions of Afghan journalists and political analysts regarding AITV's adherence to journalistic ethics in its coverage of the Islamic Emirate. Specifically, the study focuses on AITV's viewership patterns and trust levels, public and professional assessments of its ethical standards impartiality, accuracy, and independence and concerns related to potential bias, propaganda, and misinformation. By providing empirical insights into audience perceptions, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of media ethics in conflict and post-conflict contexts. The findings aim to inform Afghan media development strategies and offer guidance for policymakers and media organizations seeking to promote responsible and transparent journalism in Afghanistan and beyond.

RESEARCH METHOD

A descriptive survey research design was used to examine public perceptions of the Islamic Emirate, particularly regarding journalistic standards and media coverage by Afghanistan International Television (AITV). A total of 122 respondents participated in the study; among them, 85.4% resided in Afghanistan, while 14.6% were living abroad. From a socio-demographic perspective, 93.7% of the participants were male and 6.3% were female. Regarding professional background, 81% were journalists, 4% were political analysts, and 15% were commentators or other media professionals. In terms of linguistic background, 86.2% spoke Pashto, 12.2% spoke Dari, and 1.6% identified as speakers of other languages.

The survey instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire containing Likert-scale items (five-point scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree") to measure attitudes toward media ethics, transparency, propaganda use, privacy, and public trust. The

questionnaire was distributed both online (via Google Forms) and offline (in printed copies) to ensure accessibility and inclusivity among respondents. Prior to data collection, the instrument was reviewed by three experts in media and communication studies to ensure content validity, and a pilot test was conducted with 10 participants to verify reliability. The test yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.86, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board, and all participants provided informed consent before participation.

The collected data were coded and analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Version 25). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize responses. Inferential statistics were also applied to explore relationships between key variables. Specifically, Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to examine the associations between demographic characteristics (age, gender, and professional background) and respondents' perceptions of AITV's credibility, impartiality, and ethical conduct. Where appropriate, chi-square tests were used to compare categorical variables such as residence status (inside or outside Afghanistan) with levels of media trust. The results are presented in tables and bar charts to illustrate audience attitudes and public perceptions of Afghanistan International Television.

FINDINGS

As shown in Figure 1, most respondents (about 60%) reported watching AITV regularly without a fixed schedule, while 18.9% watched occasionally and a smaller portion rarely or not at all. This suggests that AITV maintains a moderate and consistent viewership among audiences interested in political and current affairs content.

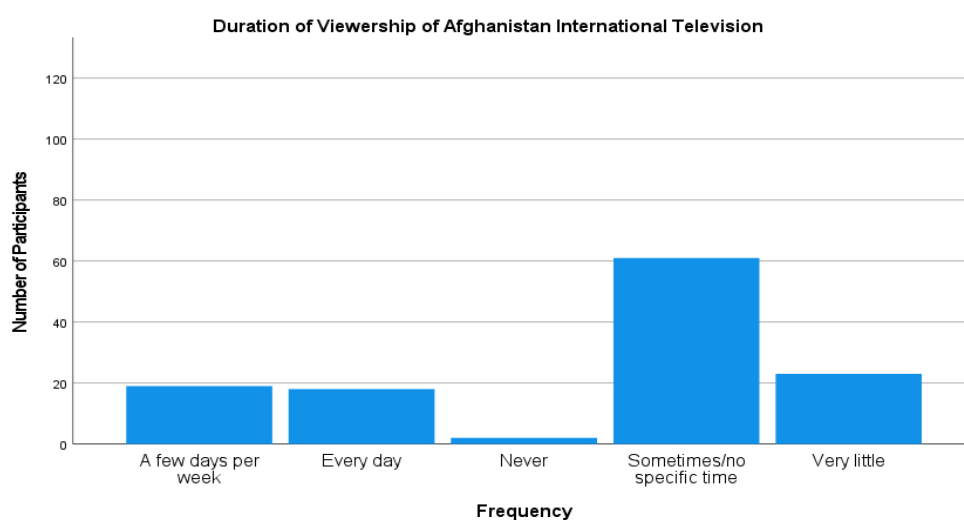


Figure 1. Duration of viewership of Afghanistan International Television among participants

Figure 2 illustrates respondents' preferences for different types of AITV broadcast content. The data indicate that current affairs programs were the most preferred (over 80%), followed by political debates (approximately 25%). In contrast, interviews, entertainment programs, and miscellaneous content each received less than 10% preference. This indicates

that audiences primarily value informative and analytical programs that discuss ongoing national and political developments.

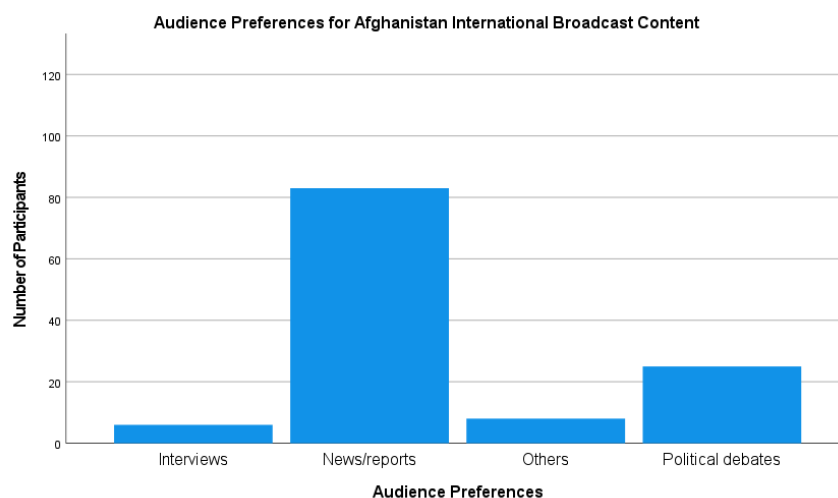


Figure 2. Audience preferences for Afghanistan International Television content

As shown in Figure 3, the alternative media sources they follow for information on Afghan issues are revealed. The BBC follows approximately 43 structures. Sixteen files support it; there are probably other sources, including lesser-known or unofficial ones. The source is National Television/Radio, with only about seven files. However, it highlights Tolo News and BBC as the leading alternative media platforms for Afghan content.

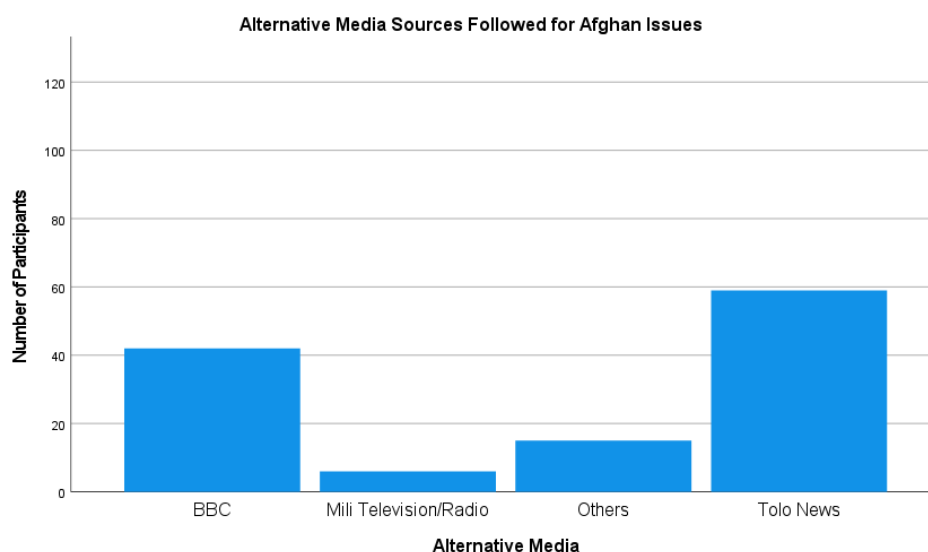


Figure 3. Number of participants following different alternative media sources for Afghan issues

The findings presented in Table 1 and Figure 4 reflect Afghanistan International TV's perceptions of its adherence to journalistic ethics in reporting on the Islamic Emirate. A significant portion of them expressed confidence in the channel's professional standards. Similarly, 39.0% reported that the channel applied journalistic ethics very little, and 30.1% believed such policies were never applied in reporting. An additional 22.0% indicated it was ethical only sometimes or at a particular time. Only 4.9% believed the channel consistently

adhered to journalistic ethics, while only 4.1% believed it did. However, the CEO of Afghanistan International TV, the Islamic Emirate, indicates that it enjoys a strong public perception as meeting professional ethical standards.

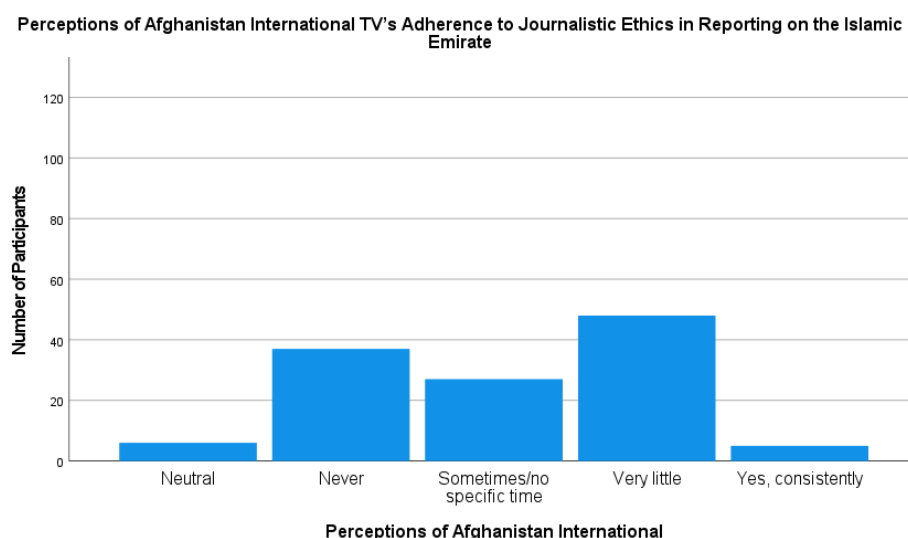


Figure 4. Distribution of participants' perceptions regarding Afghanistan International TV's adherence to journalistic ethics in reporting on the Islamic Emirate

The perceived political bias in the channel's reporting stems from its presentation of a particular or foreign narrative that does not align with local realities. In addition, inconsistencies or inaccuracies can call into question the objectivity of information presented to the public, especially on a politically sensitive topic such as the Islamic Emirate. Security can be further eroded by the representation of diverse viewpoints or an emphasis on sensationalism rather than factual reporting. However, the audience's assessment of ethical journalism can be influenced by the content and broader concerns about media coverage, agenda-setting, and the right to national identity.

Table 1. Respondents' Perceptions of Afghanistan International TV's Use of Ethical Reporting Practices Regarding the Islamic Emirate

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Natural	6	4.9
Never	37	30.1
Sometimes/ No specific time	27	22.0
Very little	47	39.0
Consistently	5	4.1
Total	122	100

As shown in Figure 5 and Table 2 below, the information in the hand shows that the public perception of the relationship offers a clear visual of how to handle the Islamic Emirate. While a significant portion of the information (43.1% (53 people)) believes there is no timeliness in a channel, a significant portion thinks very little of it. It shows that it has limited objectivity, and many viewers are confused or conflicted with the channel's real news characteristics in the Islamic Emirate. "Yes, always" (4.1%) and "Frequently/Most of the Time" (10.6%) are

examples of channels whose records they do not trust. However, Afghan International TV's objectivity is undermined by strong public distrust of its target-oriented approach. The low trust rates may be due to political bias, selective reporting, or partisan perspectives, often leading to perceptions of transparency in the broader media environment in Afghanistan. As a result, most channels' news is far from balanced, further raising concerns about the reliability and objectivity of their coverage of the Islamic Emirate.

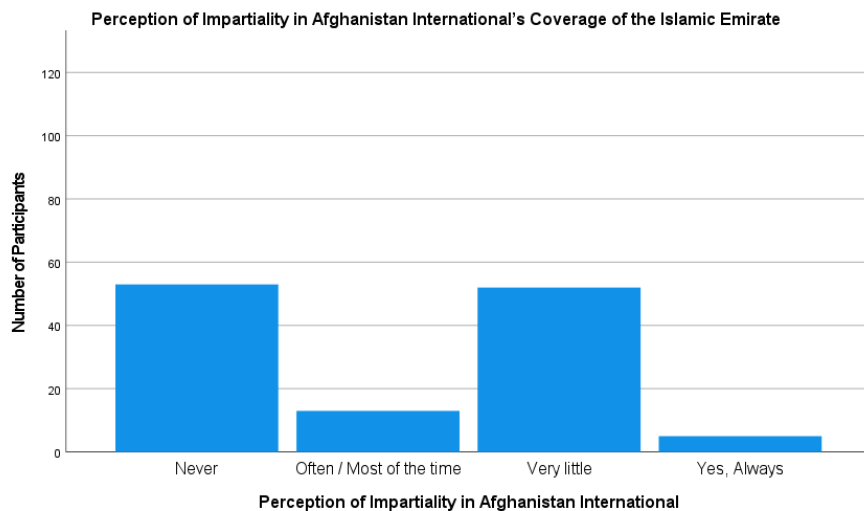


Figure 5. Perception of impartiality in Afghanistan International TV's coverage of the Islamic Emirate

Table 2 below and Figure 5 above illustrate participants' views on AITV's impartiality regarding the Islamic Emirate. 43.1% stated that AITV is "never impartial," while 42.3% said "very little". Only 14.7% believed the channel was frequently or consistently impartial. A chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 9.84$, $p < 0.05$) revealed a significant relationship between respondents' residence (inside vs. outside Afghanistan) and their perception of impartiality, indicating higher skepticism among domestic viewers.

Table 2. Frequency and percentage distribution of participants' perceptions regarding the impartiality of Afghanistan International TV's coverage of the Islamic Emirate

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	53	43.1
Often/ Most of the time	13	10.6
Very little	51	42.3
Yes, always	5	4.1
Total	122	100

Insights into public perception of transparency in the context of violations by the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan International are provided in Table 3 and Flexible Figure 6.

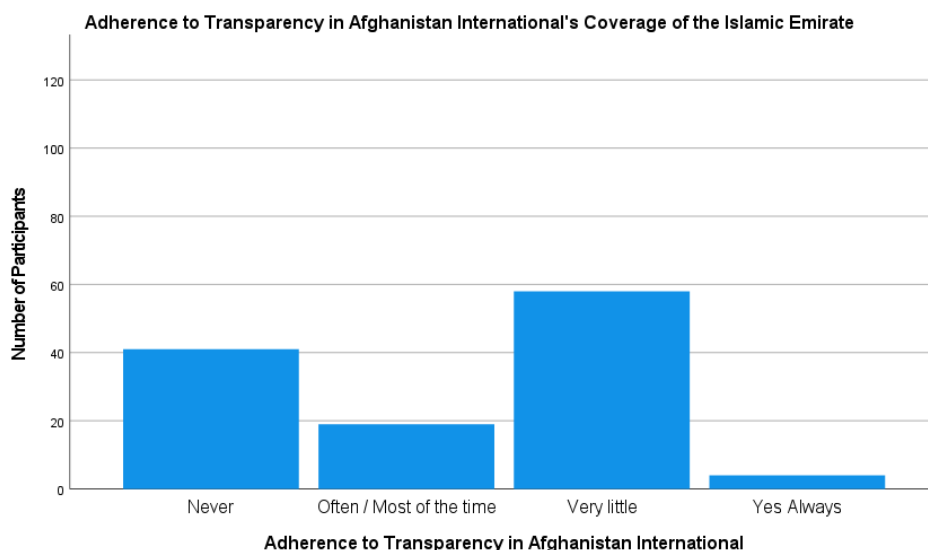


Figure 6. Distribution of Participant Responses on Transparency of Afghanistan International in Coverage of the Islamic Emirate

A channel is believed to rarely maintain this type of permanence, with flow rates of 47.2% (57 people). It is thought to hold 33.3% of the channel's transparency (41 people). Only 15.4% (19 people) think the channel is often transparent, and a tiny minority 3.3% (4 people), believe it is always transparent. Thus, a general skepticism is reflected in the channel's news and in the openness of the flows about the Islamic Emirate.

Table 3. Public Perception of Afghanistan International's Transparency in Reporting on the Islamic Emirate

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	41	33.3
Often/ Most of the time	19	15.4
Very little	57	47.2
Yes, always	4	3.3
Total	122	100

Figure 7 below presents the results of a survey assessing public perceptions of how well the international respects privacy rights under the protection of the Islamic Emirate. The data show that a significant number of respondents (around 72) believe that privacy rights are respected "very little"; however, the network's report reveals a widespread concern about the lack of attention to personal privacy. The perception of neglect in this area is further reinforced by the fact that privacy has been "never" respected for around 35 years. In contrast, only around 13 believe that privacy is respected "often or most of the time," and a minimal number, around 5, stated that the International maintains privacy standards "always". Overall, most responses highlight a forward-looking, critical view that journalistic practices regarding privacy, particularly within the Islamic Emirate, are largely poorly reported.

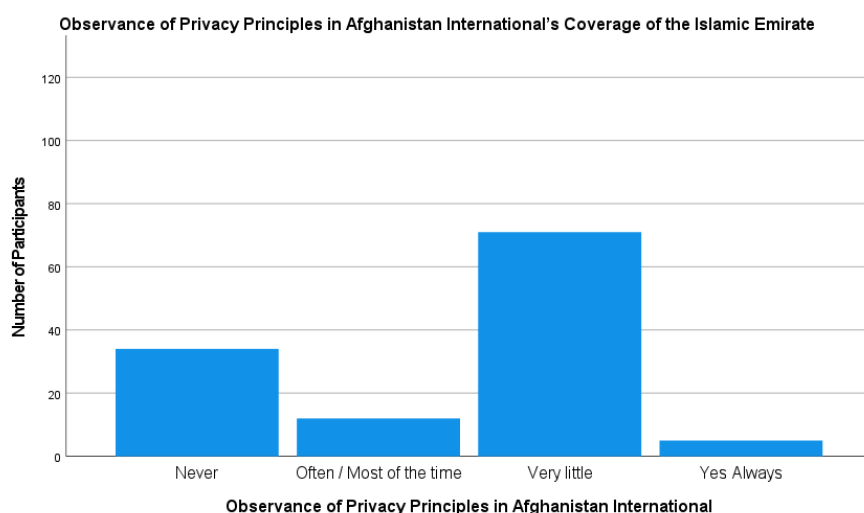


Figure 7. Public perception of Afghanistan International's observance of privacy principles in its coverage of the Islamic Emirate, with most believing privacy is rarely respected.

Figure 8 below shows the public's perceptions of respect for dignity and rights, which are to be achieved in the International's reports and publications.

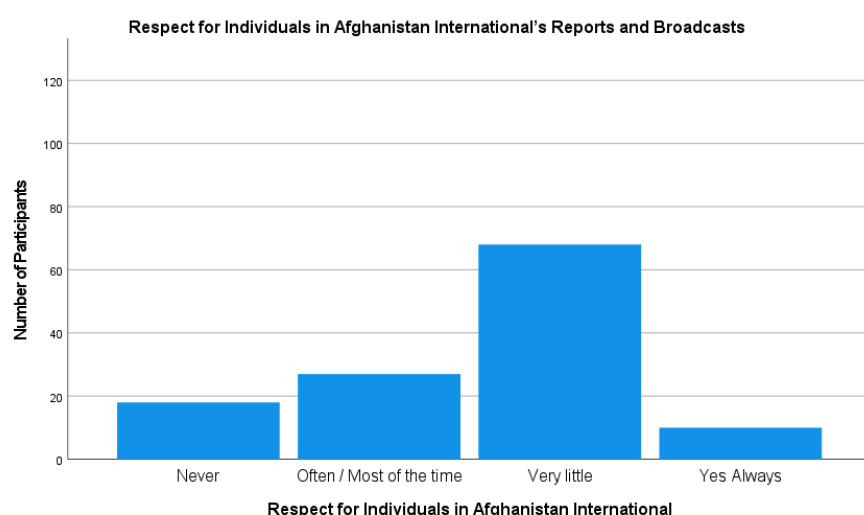


Figure 8. Public perception of respect for individuals in Afghanistan, as reported in International's reports, shows that most believe respect is minimally observed.

It shows widespread concern about the treatment of individuals, with a majority of respondents (around 69) believing that individuals are shown "too little" respect, and this is the case. Eighteen respondents believe respect is "never" observed, while 28 respondents show respect to individuals "often or most of the time". Only a small number about 11 respondents think that the International "always" shows respect to individuals. Simply put, it shows that most of the system perceives the network's reporting as lacking in the respect that rewards personal dignity.

Afghanistan International, various propaganda appears in its publications and reports regarding the Islamic Emirate", summarizes its techniques in Table 4 and Figure 9.

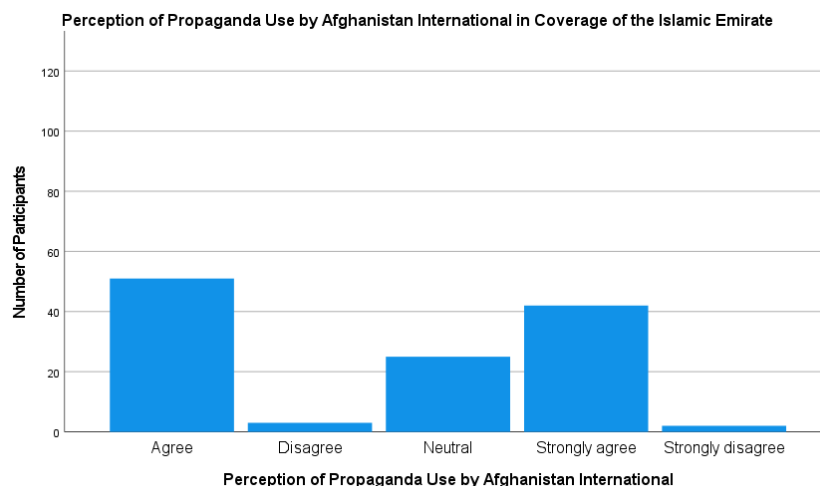


Figure 9. The majority of participants believe Afghanistan International employs propaganda techniques in its reports about the Islamic Emirate

In total, 75.6% (51% agree and 31% strongly) believe in the propaganda channel. 20.3% remain, while only 4% (2.4% disagree and 1.6% strongly disagree) reject the idea. There seems to be a strong perception that Afghanistan International resorts to propaganda practices regarding the Islamic Emirate, but this is a small perception.

Table 4. Participants' opinions on whether Afghanistan International uses propaganda in coverage of the Islamic Emirate

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	51	41.5
Disagree	3	2.4
Neutral	25	20.3
Strongly agree	41	34.1
Strongly disagree	2	1.6
Total	122	100

In Table 5 and Figure 10, Afghanistan International's confidence levels in obtaining information from reliable sources about the Islamic Emirate are shown.

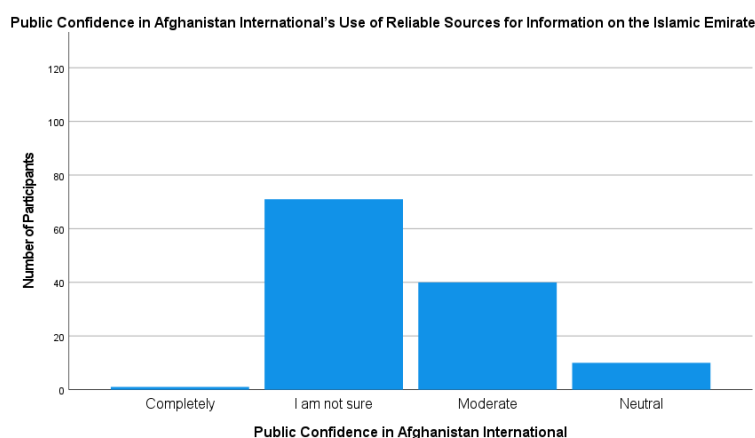


Figure 10. Most participants are unsure about the credibility of Afghanistan International's sources regarding the Islamic Emirate

While 57.7% said they are confident, 32.5% said they expect a medium level of confidence. Only 0.8% are completely confident, and 8.1% remain clear of differences. Public confidence in the reliability of Afghanistan's international structure is generally low or uncertain.

Table 5. Participants' confidence in the credibility of Afghanistan International's sources on Islamic Emirate-related information

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Completely	1	0.8
I am not sure	70	57.7
Moderate	40	32.5
Neutral	10	8.1
Total	122	100

Figure 11 presents the responses regarding the level of agreement with the statement in, "Afghanistan International gives more gloss to foreign agendas than to journalistic policies in its publications," which includes this information.

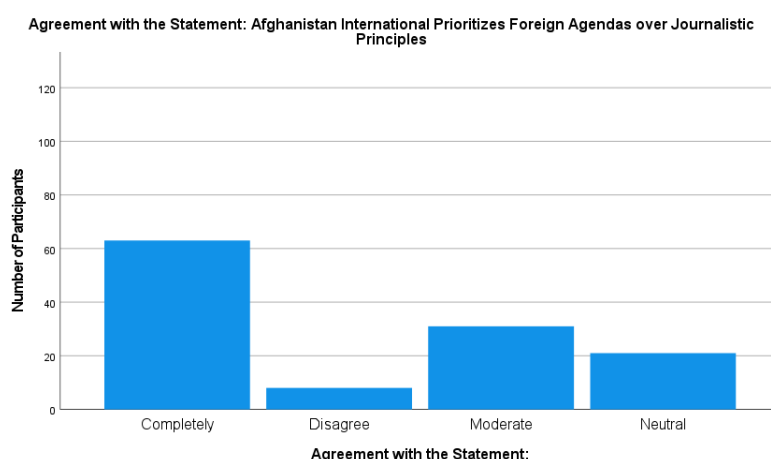


Figure 11. Level of agreement among participants regarding the claim that Afghanistan International prioritizes foreign agendas over journalistic principles

It shows that they completely agree with the statement about 65% and that there is a strong perception that the media does not comply with journalistic standards. A partial support income for the claim was observed, and a moderate level of participation was observed in about 30 units. Accordingly, a stance was taken that neither confirmed nor denied the claim about 22 damages. The foreign agendas of Afghanistan International did not align with the statement, showing limited opposition to the negotiation, with only about 10 units. It emphasizes that there is widespread concern among those who agree on the reliability and independence of the media channel's content.

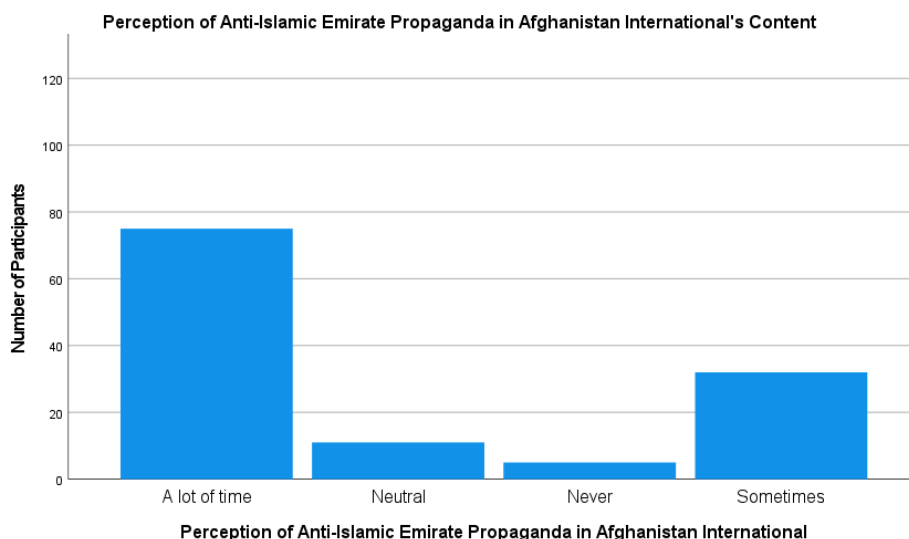


Figure 12. The majority of participants feel Afghanistan International frequently promotes anti-Islamic Emirate propaganda in its reporting

Table 6 and Figure 12 use "Afghanistan International" and "show their perceptions of Emirati propaganda in which Islam is permissible". 26% said "sometimes", while a clear majority (61%) said they observe such propaganda "most of the time". 4.1% said "never," and 8.9% remain. However, it shows that they perceive Emirati bias.

Table 6. Participants' perception of anti-Islamic Emirate propaganda in Afghanistan International's content

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
A lot of time	74	61.0
Neutral	11	8.9
Never	5	4.1
Sometimes	32	26.0
Total	122	100

Afghanistan International TV airs on the 13th day of each month, shaping public perception of the Islamic Emirate. However, it reveals that an overwhelming majority of 93% believe that the broadcast contributes to a negative perception of the Islamic Emirate. However, the negative development of the monitors is a significant continuation of the extent to which the channel's content is shown. It is indicated that there is some distortion or confusion by reporting that there is a component of their perception, a smaller part consisting of about 18 pieces. It has had a ten-year view and has not shown a strong tendency in either direction. The perception of about four pieces has strengthened the Islamic Emirate's positive image, according to the channel's program. However, most of this TV's portrayal of the Islamic Emirate is critical, mainly negative.

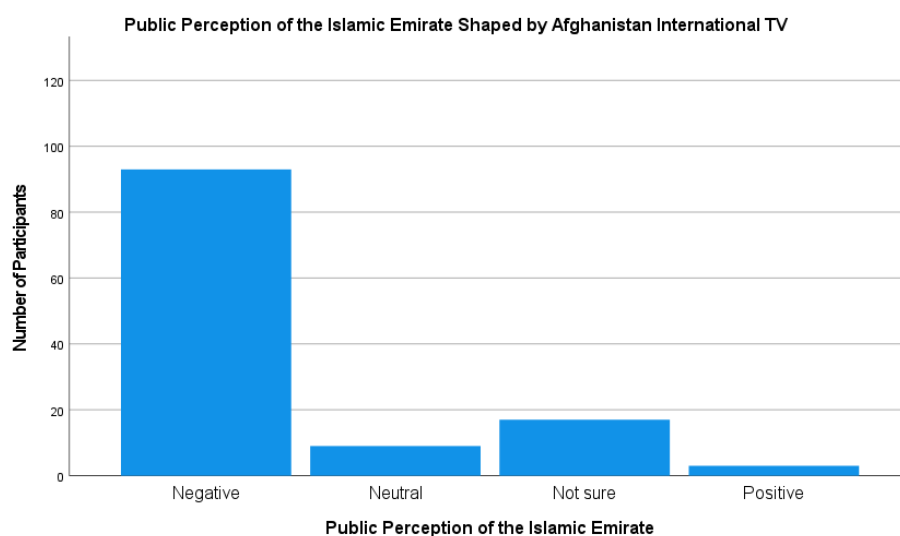


Figure 13. *Afghanistan International TV broadcasts shape public perception of the Islamic Emirate*

On the fifteenth day of the month, those above us show how they perceive Afghanistan International TV. The results show that about 55 percent believe the channel has significant power. Almost an equal number think that the channel has a medium level of influence; yet the majority shows at least some media. However, about 5 years ago, there were no events, while about 17 years ago, there were very few. Overall, it highlights the strong perceived role of Afghanistan International TV in influencing and shaping public opinion in Afghanistan.

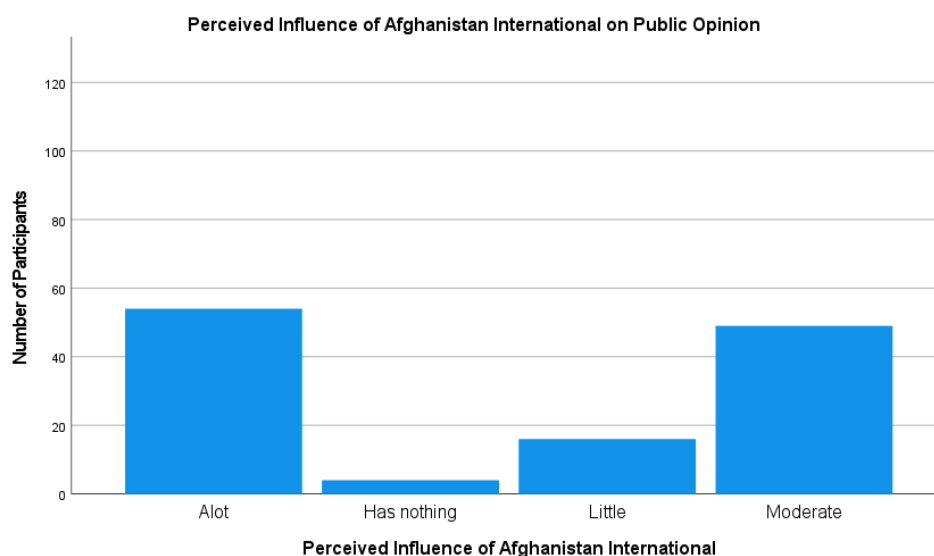


Figure 14. *Perceived influence of Afghanistan International TV on public opinion*

Table 7 and Figure 14 below indicate whether news about the Islamic Emirate incident affected the eclipse.

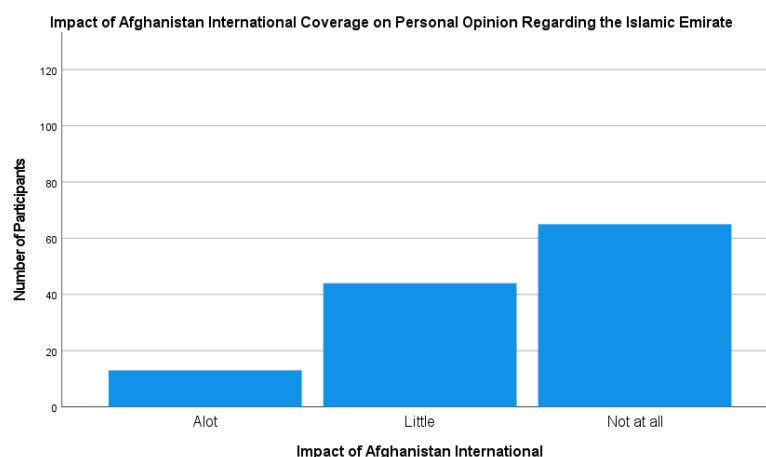


Figure 14. The majority of participants say Afghanistan International's reporting has not affected their views on the Islamic Emirate

The results illustrate that 35.6% agreed that there was little impact, while more than half (53.6%) said the publications had no impact. Only 10.6% reported being significantly affected. As a result, the amount of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan International was not significantly affected.

Table 7. Participants' views on the influence of Afghanistan International's coverage of the Islamic Emirate on their thinking

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
A lot	13	10.6
Little	44	35.6
Not at all	64	53.6
Total	122	100

As shown in Figure 15, Afghanistan International's editorial independence in its broadcasts is reflected in the public perception of 40 channels used in the "I am not sure" section on independence, approximately, which is in the line with the performance or ambiguity of events.

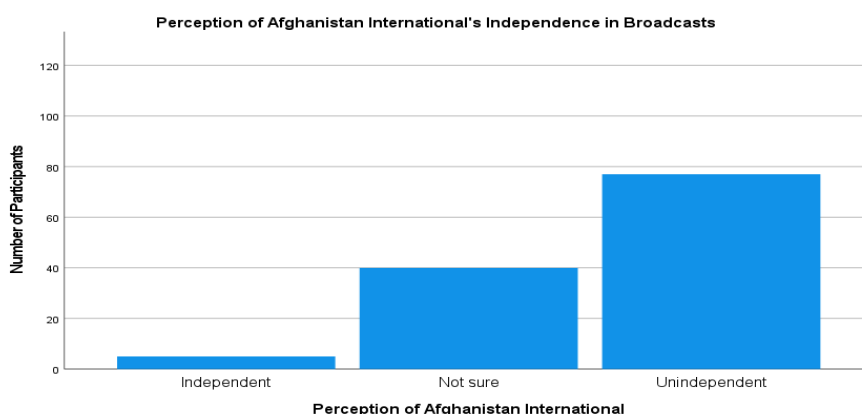


Figure 15. Perception of Afghanistan International's editorial independence among participants. The majority view the channel as independent, while fewer participants are unsure, and only a small minority consider it independent

Only a small minority —about six units —believes it operates without independent political influence. However, the distribution of the channel highlights a general lack of trust and suggests that most of its content is influenced or controlled by external political forces.

As shown in Figure 16 below, the comparison with other Afghan media outlets shows that the trust in Afghanistan International TV has increased. It has taken about 10 years, while the security has been in place for about 18 years. Unfortunately, only a few (about six people) expressed great trust in Afghan International.

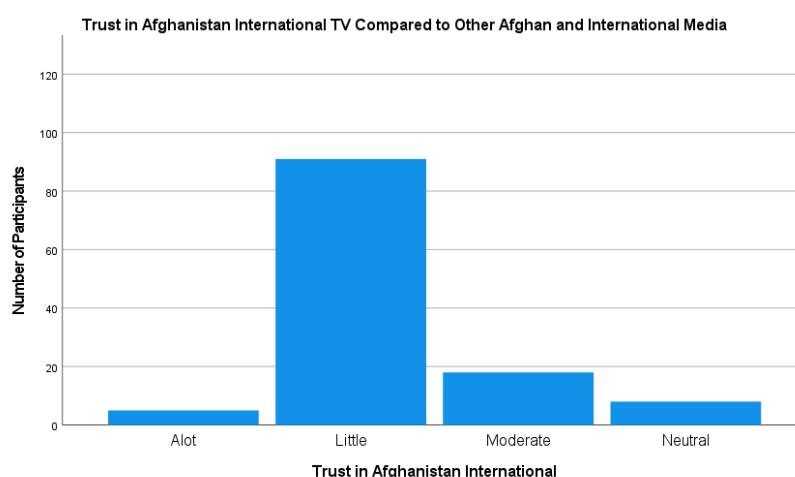


Figure 16. Participants' trust in Afghanistan International TV compared to other Afghan and international media. Most respondents reported having little trust in the channel, while very few expressed high levels of trust.

Compared with other Afghan media outlets, AITV scored lower in trust and credibility, with only six respondents (4.9%) expressing “high trust.” This demonstrates that AITV’s perceived lack of neutrality has significantly affected its reputation among Afghan audiences.

DISCUSSION

These results indicate that public trust in Afghanistan International Television (AITV) remains generally low, particularly in its coverage of the Islamic Emirate (Hadland, 2012). The study assessed perceptions of AITV’s transparency, ethical standards, and impartiality (Khan, 2015). Findings reveal notable inconsistencies in the channel’s adherence to journalistic ethics, which undermine its credibility and weaken professional integrity (Deuze, 2020).

Most respondents reported watching AITV primarily for political and current affairs programs, though often with caution due to perceived political bias and limited local representation (Gehrke et al., 2017). Similar trends have been observed in previous Afghan media surveys, where audiences favored outlets like BBC and Tolo News for their perceived reliability and organizational credibility (Villi et al., 2019).

The data highlight widespread perceptions of ethical shortcomings at AITV, consistent with theories emphasizing fairness, accountability, and transparency as foundations of media trust (Ward, 2005; Deuze, 2020). The findings suggest that external political pressures and

editorial dependence shape AITV's coverage, resulting in selective framing and reduced neutrality (Harcup et al., 2017). Such dynamics reflect broader challenges faced by exiled or foreign-based media operating in conflict settings, where contextual disconnection can erode authenticity and audience engagement.

Concerns regarding privacy and respect for individuals also emerged as key ethical issues. Respondents perceived AITV as neglecting privacy rights and occasionally resorting to sensationalism under political or competitive pressure (Matar et al., 2023). This reflects a broader pattern in conflict-zone journalism, where ethical principles may be compromised by urgency and external influence.

A significant portion of respondents agreed that AITV employs propaganda-like narratives or relies heavily on foreign-sourced content in its coverage of the Islamic Emirate (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2018). This perception, aligning with studies on media credibility, suggests that editorial framing shaped by foreign agendas undermines trust (Splendore, 2016; Neiger, 2020). Although audiences acknowledge AITV's influence in shaping public discourse, its impact is viewed as unreliable due to perceived external interference (Hellmueller et al., 2015).

Overall, these findings reinforce that ethical consistency, transparency, and contextual independence is central to rebuilding audience trust in post-conflict media environments. Compared with domestic outlets, AITV suffers from weaker perceived credibility, likely due to its distance from local realities. Theoretically, this underscores the importance of grounded journalism where fairness, cultural sensitivity, and accountability intersect to sustain credibility amid political uncertainty.

Practically, AITV and similar broadcasters should strengthen ethical governance, promote editorial independence, and integrate local perspectives into reporting. By aligning their practices with the theoretical frameworks of media ethics and trust-building, they may enhance legitimacy and foster more balanced, responsible journalism in Afghanistan's evolving media landscape.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates widespread distrust in Afghanistan International Television (AITV), particularly concerning its coverage of the Islamic Emirate. The channel is perceived as lacking transparency, neglecting privacy and human dignity, and prioritizing foreign agendas over journalistic integrity, resulting in low audience confidence. Although AITV remains popular for political and current affairs content, these ethical shortcomings emphasize the urgent need for improved journalistic practices. To strengthen credibility, Afghan and exiled media should enhance ethical guidelines, ensure editorial independence, and increase transparency and accountability in reporting. Policymakers can support these efforts by promoting adherence to international journalism standards and facilitating training programs focused on ethical reporting. Future research could examine audience trust across various Afghan media outlets,

including digital platforms, and assess the effectiveness of interventions aimed at improving ethics and public confidence. Overall, fostering ethical, transparent, and context-sensitive journalism is essential for rebuilding public trust and ensuring balanced media coverage in Afghanistan.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS

Yahya Yaqubi: Writing original draft preparation, validation, writing review and editing, supervision, conceptualization, methodology, validation,

Noor Ahmad Nabil: Conceptualization, validation,

Abdul Manan Sapi: Conceptualization, methodology, validation

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors state that they do not have any conflict interests.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Raw data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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